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Eleventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 191st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 21 January 1992, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. TALLAWY

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Initial, second and third periodic reports of Ghana (CEDAW/C/GHA/1-3)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Akuffo (Ghana) took a place at the Committee table.

2. Ms. AKUFFO (Ghana), introducing her counrty's combined initial, second and third periodic reports, said that the female population accounted for 51.3 per cent of the total population of Ghana. Most Ghanaians lived in rural areas, although the proportion living in urban areas was growing. Female-headed households were on the increase, with at least 29.6 per cent of rural and 35.8 per cent of urban households being headed by women.

3. By law, women in Ghana enjoyed equal status with men. Despite such de jure equality, however, Ghanaian women were discriminated against in many spheres of life, because of a combination of factors which included low levels of basic education and training and poor health. The high premium traditionally placed on child-bearing resulted in high fertility levels and the need to combine reproductive roles with arduous economic and domestic duties. The difficult economic conditions characterizing the lives of most women, particularly those in rural areas, also worked against their full enjoyment of equal status with men. They none the less played important roles in society as economic producers, mothers and nurturers, and they were in the front line of family health delivery.

4. Summarizing the legal and other measures taken to implement the Convention, she said that the Convention was likely to receive strong legal backing from the new draft constitutional proposals prepared in July 1991, which were being considered by a consultative assembly that included representatives of the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD). The NCWD and other government agencies, as well as a number of non-governmental organizations, were working to improve implementation of the Convention in Ghana and provided assistance to women in many spheres.

5. Concerning article 1 of the Convention, Ghana's draft constitutional proposals defined "discrimination" as "affording different treatment to different persons attributable only or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, gender ...". Concerning article 2, the principle of equality of men and women was embodied in the laws of Ghana. In addition, the draft constitutional proposals currently under consideration made provision for the enactment of legislation to ensure the protection of basic human rights, including the rights of women, children and other vulnerable groups in the development process. Laws had also been enacted dealing with some of the areas where women were most oppressed, for

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instance laws on intestate succession, the registration of marriages and divorces and the accountability of heads of families.

6. With regard to article 3, measures had been taken to enhance the status of women by, inter alia, increasing their access to education and health care. Concerning article 4, special temporary measures had been taken in the educational sector to accelerate women's attainment of equal levels with men. For instance, sixth-form science entry requirements were less stringent for girls.

7. Turning to article 5, social and cultural beliefs and practices in Ghana promoted a view of women as being subservient to men. Women were traditionally regarded as producers of human beings, goods and services. Their inferior status was reinforced by polygamy, early betrothal and marriage, and widow inheritance. Unfortunately, the socialization process had taught women to accept those practices as the norm. Little change had been achieved in that area, although educational programmes organized by the NCWD spoke out against outmoded customs.

8. With regard to article 6, prostitution per se was not an offence in Ghana, although prostitution-related offences such as soliciting were, as was the traffic in women and girls. Measures to suppress those practices included educational programmes. One of the general aims of income-generating programmes was to remove the need for women and girls to resort to prostitution as a means of livelihood.

9. With regard to article 7, women's participation in public life was restricted mainly by their lack of the education necessary to attain high positions and the constraints placed on their time by the demands of their multiple roles. The most significant measures to increase women's participation in public and political life were contained in the draft constitutional proposals, which recommended that authorities should as far as practicable appoint an equal number of men and women. In 1991, the NCWD had organized a seminar on women in leadership to sensitize policy makers to the importance of women's participation in public life and highlight their near-invisibility at decision-making levels. Turning to article 8, women in Ghana had the legal right to represent their Government internationally, but in practice could not exercise that right to the same extent as men owing to factors similar to those limiting their participation in public life. However, spouses of nationals posted abroad were now allowed to engage in remunerated activities.

10. Turning to article 9, under the new draft constitutional proposals, the annulment of a marriage would no longer lead to loss of citizenship for a woman who had acquired it through that marriage. With regard to article 10, the status of women in education was particularly low. Male and female participation was almost equal in the initial stages of education, but female participation dropped sharply after secondary level and was less than

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20 per cent by tertiary level. Illiteracy was correspondingly widespread among women and was detrimental both to their participation in the economy and to their own and their children's health.

11. Educational reforms implemented in 1987 had included measures to address girls' and women's needs in education. Non-gender curricula had been designed to sustain the interest of both girls and boys and efforts had been made to increase girls' interest in and study of science subjects at higher levels. A nationwide functional literacy programme had also targeted women as a priority group, and extensive efforts were being made to increase women's knowledge and use of family planning methods.

12. Turning to article 11, Ghana had ratified ILO Conventions on, inter alia, equal remuneration, women's rights as workers and maternity protection. However, the relevant provisions were enforced only in the formal sector and therefore had little impact on the lives of the majority of women working in the informal sector. Where they did venture into the formal sector, women tended to remain in low-paying unskilled or low-skilled jobs. Measures to enhance women's status in employment included the provision of child-care facilities and also training programmes to assist women engaged in informal economic activities.

13. With regard to article 12, women had equal access to health services, but their health was adversely affected by traditional values and practices, their high fertility levels and low levels of education, and the limited coverage of health services. The Primary Health Care Programme was the main vehicle for improving the health of women and children. Efforts to expand and improve coverage included the training of traditional birth attendants in hygienic birthing methods. One important component of public health education programmes in recent years had been the prevention and control of AIDS. The risks to women and their role in limiting the spread of the disease had been acknowledged, and women were one of the main targets of the programme. A maternal and child health/family planning programme was a priority, but its expansion and coverage were subject to major constraints. Other measures to improve women's health included the provision of safe drinking water to prevent water-borne diseases, which were a major health problem. The draft constitutional proposals also addressed women's health problems and called, in particular, for the abolition of all customary practices injurious to the physical and mental well-being of women, such as female circumcision.

14. With regard to article 13, women's access to credit was limited by such factors as their lack of collateral and the small-scale nature of their economic activities, as well as their own unwillingness to take the risk of obtaining loans. A number of projects to grant or guarantee loans to women did, however, exist.

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15. Turning to article 14, at least 60 per cent of Ghanaian women continued to live in rural areas, where they were mostly engaged in small-scale farming. Most development efforts to enhance the status of women focused on such women, who were also increasingly involved in activities such as safe water supply and environmental protection which had a bearing on their domestic responsibilities as suppliers of water and fuel. They were also a focal point for adult literacy programmes and the Primary Health Care Programme.

16. With regard to article 15, women's exercise of their legal rights, which were in theory equal to those of men, was inhibited by their ignorance of those rights and their fear of asserting them, especially where husbands or other family members were concerned, and of course by their lack of resources. Measures to enhance women's exercise of their legal rights included a free legal aid scheme for women. Turning to article 16, the new draft constitutional proposals would guarantee the property rights of women in marriage, thereby greatly improving upon the existing situation, under which property that a wife helped her husband to acquire belonged solely to him.

17. Women in Ghana had the same right as men to choose a spouse and enter into marriage. There were three legally recognized systems of marriage - marriage under customary law, marriage under the Marriage Ordinance and marriage under the Marriage of Mohammedans Ordinance - and the status of women in marriage varied from one system to another. Most women were married under some form of customary law, within which their rights were quite limited. Although they could acquire and own separate property, the husband was the absolute head of the family and had rights not shared by the woman, such as the right to more than one spouse. With the passing of new laws on intestate succession and the registration of customary marriages and divorces, the rights of women in marriage had improved considerably. However, the practical effect had yet to be felt by most women because of the prevalence of customary values and practices and women's ignorance of their rights under the new laws. Even when they knew about the new laws, they appeared to be hesitant to take advantage of them and were often urged to settle marriage and family matters at home.

18. Although much remained to be done before women in Ghana attained full equality with men, it was encouraging to note that the legal and policy-making environment in Ghana was improving in such areas as health and education. Because societal attitudes were still the major obstacle to the advancement of women, the Government would step up public education programmes to enhance awareness of the potential role of women in Ghanaian society.

19. Ms. OESER said that the report submitted by Ghana was a useful means of acquainting the Committee with the problems of Ghanaian women and their attitude towards those problems.

20. Ms. UKEJE said that, although she would have liked more statistics reflecting the improving status of Ghanaian women, she was impressed by the report and by the Ghanaian Government's efforts, despite its economic difficulties, to remedy the effects of long-standing traditions that resulted in discrimination against women.

21. Ms. ALFONSIN DE FASAN said that Ghana's frank report reflected not only the situation of extreme discrimination against women, but also the tremendous efforts of the Government and of non-governmental organizations to overcome cultural obstacles to equality. The provisions of the Convention should provide support and guidance in that regard.

22. Ms. EVATT said she was encouraged to note the Ghanaian Government's commitment to the advancement of women, as reflected in its impressively frank report. She was pleased that the improvement of women's health and education were priorities and that the need to change traditional attitudes towards women had been identified and was being addressed.

23. Ms. AKAMATSU said that she welcomed Ghana's ratification of the Convention without reservations, as well as its impressive efforts to combat discrimination despite economic difficulties. The establishment of the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) in 1975, which had been International Women's Year, had promoted ratification of the Convention. She asked for further information on the budget and organization of the NCWD and other national machinery for the advancement of women. She also wondered whether such marriage-related problems as polygamy and the inheritance system had been addressed, and asked for details on the content and effectiveness of the four laws promulgated in 1985 concerning intestate succession, the registration of marriages and divorces, head of family accountability and the administration of estates.

24. Ms. SCHOPP-SCHILLING said that Ghana's Government was evidently serious about pursuing its policies for women. Since customary laws were the greatest barrier to equality in Ghana, she asked for more details about such laws and the number of women living under them. At the same time, not all customary laws were necessarily disadvantageous for women; in matrilineal systems, for example, women played an important social role. One problem of development was that legislation establishing formal equality sometimes ignored traditions that actually enhanced women's participation in society. She asked whether the Ghanaian Government had any immediate plans for dealing with customary law, or whether it would take a purely educational approach to the problem. With respect to article 4 of the Convention, she was pleased that Ghana had adopted temporary special measures directed towards specific goals, and hoped that the Ghanaian Government would continue that policy.

25. Ms. WALLA-TCHANGAI said that much remained to be done in Ghana, especially on such economic and health issues as the economic evaluation of women's work in the informal sector, female illiteracy, prostitution and AIDS. However, the Government's willingness to take action promised to lead to an improvement of women's status in Ghana.

26. Ms. LAIOU-ANTONIOU said that although machinery to deal with women's issues had been established in Ghana, its effectiveness was limited by the fact that it was highly centralized; decentralization and additional financial resources were necessary. Moreover, such machinery alone was insufficient, since the establishment of equality must form an integral part of solutions to social and political problems affecting the whole population. She asked how women could participate in decisions regarding the distribution of development aid from Governments, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, since such aid often was not allocated to addressing women's concerns. She also asked why there had been an increase in female-headed households, as indicated in paragraph 11 of Ghana's report.

27. Ms. QUINTOS-DELES said that if the report's incisive analysis of the situation of Ghanaian women was followed by determined action, positive changes would result. She commended the NCWD for shifting its emphasis from income-generating activities for women to integrating women's concerns into Government programmes and policies. However, she was concerned about the Council's intention to coordinate the work of non-governmental organizations. It was important that Governments should avoid limiting the independence of such organizations, which were most effective when they acted autonomously under separate mandates.

28. Ms. NIKOLAEVA said that although she was disturbed by the persistence of de jure and de facto discrimination against women in Ghana, she was encouraged by the report's objective discussion of the problem and hoped that the Government would show the political will to address it as a priority. The high rate of illiteracy among women, especially women in rural areas, was cause for particular concern. She hoped that UNESCO would continue its educational programmes in Ghana and that the Ghanaian Government and women themselves would work towards the goals set by UNESCO. Many of the problems of Ghanaian women, such as their unwillingness to participate in political life, the limitation of their economic activity to small businesses and unskilled labour, their inferior social status and their lack of access to bank loans, were directly related to illiteracy and lack of education. Those problems could not be solved unless women's organizations took the initiative of working actively with the Government in that area.

29. Ms. SHANGZHEN said that despite Ghana's difficulties, as a developing country, in gathering the necessary statistics and other information, it had prepared an impressive report that reflected the serious efforts of the Government and the NCWD to address women's issues.

30. Ms. BRAVO NUÑEZ DE RAMSEY said that illiteracy and malnutrition were among the most serious problems of Ghanaian women, and that the Government should therefore implement special programmes for women and children.

31. Ms. AOUIJ said that she was sensitive to Ghana's human development problems, which were compounded by its precarious economic situation. She asked the representative of Ghana to explain the current basis of the Government's laws and policies, since the Constitution had been suspended in 1979.

Article 2

32. Ms. ALFONSIN DE FASAN asked what was being done to ensure that customary law did not conflict with other legal provisions and that religious and cultural customs that violated human rights were eliminated.

Article 3

33. Ms. BRAVO NUÑEZ DE RAMSEY, noting from paragraph 7 of the report that in 1984 children aged 0 to 14 years had accounted for 45 per cent of the population, said that the high proportion of children would lower per capita income since it meant that the economically active population was small. In those circumstances, the Ghanaian Government should take steps to encourage women to work outside the home and provide them with training. She asked what legal, economic, cultural, social and educational measures had been taken in that respect.

Article 4

34. Ms. ILIC, referring to paragraph 51, asked whether there was any timetable for the process undertaken by the Law Reform Commission, the Attorney-General's Department and FIDA and what the prospects were of their proposals being accepted.

35. Ms. OESER said that the Committee had noted in the past that some Governments were reluctant to adopt special temporary measures; that also seemed to be true of the Ghanaian Government. In her view, the legal reforms envisaged in paragraph 51 were permanent in nature and did not fall within the scope of article 4. She therefore asked for clarification of the Ghanaian Government's understanding of article 4 of the Convention.

Article 5

36. Ms. UKEJE noted that the law on intestate succession had been enacted but was not being enforced. She asked what was being done by the media, churches and local bodies to make people aware of that law, especially in rural communities where people were more likely to die intestate. She wished to know more about the educational programmes referred to in paragraph 59 and how successful they had been.

37. Ms. ILIC said that the situation of widows in Ghana seemed very unfortunate and noted that the perpetrators of widowhood rites were actually women. She asked whether the educational programmes referred to in

paragraph 59 were directed only at women or also at men, since men's approval must be secured if attitudes were to be changed, and what results had been achieved so far. It was surprising to note from paragraph 57 that the position of women was extremely precarious; that situation was unusual in matriarchal communities. She asked for clarification.

38. It seemed that changes in attitudes and stereotypes were urgently needed in Ghana and that women, and the Government, were conscious of that need. She asked how much work had been done by non-governmental organizations, how much money they had been allocated by the Government and whether their efforts were to continue.

39. Ms. BUSTELO GARCIA del REAL asked for further information about the statistical incidence of widowhood rites and other forms of violence against women. It appeared from the report that the Ghanaian Government did not feel that it could eliminate such customs in the short term. She asked whether the Government had considered drawing up a medium-term plan for the eradication of customs that discriminated against women; it could perhaps concentrate on the most discriminatory customs first.

40. Ms. BERNARD said that it was clear from the report that the Ghanaian Government was facing up to the problems encountered by Ghanaian women and was prepared to seek solutions, despite the difficulty of changing entrenched attitudes. She asked how successful attempts to overcome stereotypes and re-educate people had been and what was meant by "maternal inheritance to stool" in paragraph 57.

41. Ms. EVATT requested further information about traditional practices, including widowhood rites, customary divorce on grounds of witchcraft and funeral rites, and about the extent of polygamy and child marriage. She also asked whether political and social leaders were speaking out against those practices and trying to influence Ghanaians to change such attitudes and customs.

42. Ms. GONZALEZ MARTINEZ said that it was clearly a massive undertaking to change traditions and customs which were as old as Ghanaian society, yet it was clear from the report that the Ghanaian Government was trying to effect changes in customs and practices among the various ethnic groups in Ghana. She commended the Government's frankness in discussing such problems as initiation rites, widowhood rites and female circumcision, and hoped that efforts to change practices and traditions that discriminated against women would be continued with due respect for Ghana's unique culture.

43. Ms. FORDE commended the Ghanaian Government for having ratified the Convention in 1986 without reservations; that represented a firm commitment to seeking to comply with the provisions of the Convention. With regard to article 5 of the Convention, she asked whether Ghanaian women, especially young women, really accepted their circumstances and whether there had been

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any attempt to ascertain how women felt and whether they themselves would welcome changes in their situation.

44. The representative of Ghana had mentioned that women had the same legal and employment rights as men and the same right to choose a spouse; she asked how that situation could be reconciled with the reality of the social situation in Ghana, or whether the two situations existed in parallel.

45. Ms. AKAMATSU noted from paragraph 52 that throughout Ghana a woman was considered in need of protection throughout her life. A similar attitude prevailed in Japan, where a woman was expected to be obedient to her father, her husband and her son. She asked how women in Ghana were struggling against such ideas.

46. Ms. BRAVO NUÑEZ DE RAMSEY asked what was meant by the "socialization process" in paragraph 56 and requested information about initiation rites.

47. Ms. CORTI said that although it was a long-term, uphill struggle to ensure compliance with article 5 of the Convention in a traditional society, it was not clear what efforts the Ghanaian Government was making to abolish stereotyping. She recalled that in Tanzania, seminars, conferences and meetings had been organized to explain the dangers of female circumcision and other traditional practices and gradually to raise the awareness of both men and women. She asked whether any similar activities had been undertaken in Ghana. She also asked whether widowhood rites had been abolished in practice, or whether they persisted. She requested information about the role played by non-governmental organizations in the implementation of article 5.

48. Ms. SHANGZHEN said it was clear that outmoded customs and social prejudices still exerted a strong influence on Ghanaian society, to the detriment of women. Little success had been achieved in modifying social and cultural patterns, although it was true that laws alone could not abolish outmoded attitudes and habits. She asked for information about the Ghanaian Government's plans for further legal reform and for educational programmes aimed at the whole of society so as to bring about fundamental changes in women's rights and status.

Article 6

49. Ms. WALLA-TCHANGAI asked whether any research had been done on the reasons for all types of prostitution, open, clandestine and occasional. She asked what was being done to make health services available to women at risk, in particular to combat the spread of AIDS. Educational programmes were not enough to discourage prostitution, its causes must be tackled; she asked whether there were reception, reintegration or reorientation structures, especially in trade, agriculture and handicrafts, for women who wished to abandon prostitution.

50. Ms. ALFONSIN DE FASAN said that the report referred to the need for vigilance in order to track down and punish the women and men who traded young women to other countries (para. 62); how were those operations carried out? She asked whether vulnerable groups of women had access to contraceptives, particularly so as to prevent the spread of AIDS.

51. Ms. BUSTELO GARCIA del REAL requested information on the number of prostitutes in Ghana and on efforts to prevent the spread of AIDS. She asked whether any special measures had been taken to combat traffic in women and girls to other countries and whether Ghanaian consulates abroad or non-governmental organizations, particularly in developed countries, provided assistance to such women.

52. Ms. BERNARD asked what legislation existed in Ghana to prevent traffic in women and girls (para. 62), how effective it had been and whether new legislation was envisaged.

53. Ms. CORTI said that paragraph 63 referred to a national consultation on prostitution organized in 1980; she asked whether anything had been done since then.

Article 7

54. Ms. EVATT said that in order to effect change, it was important to ensure a commitment to change at all levels of government, especially the highest levels. It was unfortunate that not many Ghanaian women participated in Ghanaian politics and that few were elected to Parliament or representative office or even to district assemblies. She asked whether any measures were planned to promote greater political participation by women, so as to ensure that women's concerns were addressed in political life.

55. Ms. BERNARD noted from paragraph 68 of the report that few women had served as judges and magistrates; she asked whether the percentage had increased since 1984, the year for which figures were provided.

56. Ms. GONZALEZ MARTINEZ said that without improvements in education and changes in mentality, it was very difficult for women to participate in political and public life. Paragraph 66 indicated that, in principle, women had equal terms with men, but that in practice they were handicapped by lack of education and the cultural environment. She asked whether any action had been taken, other than the programmes mentioned in paragraph 71, to bring about changes in attitude through education so that women could participate more fully in political activities.

57. Ms. CORTI said that in Europe numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the International Federation of Business and Professional Women and the Soroptimist International Association, were active in promoting the political education and advancement of women; she wondered whether similar efforts were being undertaken in Ghana. While women appeared to be

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professionally emancipated in Ghana, there was no evidence in the report of their promotion in politics and she pointed out that NGO programmes aimed at fostering the political promotion of women would be conducive to the process of broad democratization in Ghana.

Article 9

58. Ms. AKAMATSU said that the discriminatory provisions of Ghana's Nationality Act, referred to in paragraphs 74 and 76 of the report, conflicted directly with the Convention. She understood, however, that certain changes, referred to by the representative of Ghana in her statement, had been made in the existing legislation. She requested further information concerning the position of children under the Ghana Nationality Act, as required under article 9, paragraph 2, of the Convention.

Article 10

59. Ms. LAIOU-ANTONIOU said that the statistics on family planning practice in Ghana, given in paragraph 142 of the report, were a source of concern. In view of the urgent need to control population growth, it was discouraging that such a low percentage of Ghanaian women used family planning. She wondered what explanation could be adduced for the failure of family planning programmes in Ghana and whether the United Nations and UNFPA expenditure on such programmes was justified. Where such programmes had manifestly succeeded in Europe, they had failed in Asian and African countries, and family size had continued to grow, as a result of social, economic or cultural factors. She wondered which of those factors had been most influential in Ghana.

60. Ms. FORDE wondered whether the low school attendance rate for young women was linked exclusively to early marriage and pregnancy, and not also caused by financial circumstances. She asked whether education was free at all levels and whether comprehensive family planning education was readily available.

61. Ms. OESER asked, with reference to school-going mothers and the availability of day-care facilities, whether current information was available, as the figures in table 17 referred to 1984 and the situation could have changed substantially.

62. Ms. AOUIJ said that Ghana was making commendable efforts in the area of women's education, but that many women were losing their literacy skills because of the high cost of books and the general lack of reading materials. In the light of the literacy targets for women set for the year 2000, she wondered what steps were being taken by the National Council on Women and Development to that end, such as by publishing a women's magazine and assisting school children with the provision of books.

63. Ms. AKAMATSU said that the Ghanaian Government had taken impressive steps in combating illiteracy and she wondered, therefore, why the absolute number of females aged six years and above who had never attended school had

increased from 2.1 million in 1960 to 2.6 million in 1984, as stated in paragraph 115 of the report. With reference to the statistics in table 10 concerning literacy rates, she noted a discrepancy under age group 35-44 for Accra, where the overall percentage was greater than the separate percentages for men and women.

Article 11

64. Ms. LAIOU-ANTONIOU requested further information on the activities undertaken by self-employed women, since they constituted such a large proportion of the work force. She also asked whether Ghanaian legislation provided for equal pay for work of equal value, or equal pay for equal work.

65. Ms. QUINTOS-DELES said that the Government was to be commended on its efforts to establish more child-care facilities but noted that its task would be formidable, if not impossible, if it were to focus exclusively on conventional, centre-based child care, in view of its limited resources. She suggested that the Government should look also at alternative methods, emphasizing the training of care givers and the recycling of discarded materials for the production of toys and educational materials. Consideration should also be given to non-centre-based child-care facilities.

66. Ms. OESER noted from paragraph 161 of the report that work done by women in the home and unpaid agricultural work were not counted as part of the country's gross national product (GNP). The failure by Ghana and many other countries to take account of that work in their GNP had prompted CEDAW General Recommendation No. 17, on the measurement and quantification of unremunerated domestic activities, in which States were recommended to undertake research work on that topic and to gather relevant data. She wondered whether Ghana had collected any data which it could share with the Committee.

67. Ms. AKAMATSU said that, in her understanding, Ghana had no law guaranteeing equal opportunities for women with respect to placement, promotion, working conditions and retirement and she suggested, therefore, that it might be necessary to enact such legislation to guarantee the rights of women in the workplace, in accordance with the provisions of article 11 of the Convention.

Article 12

68. Ms. EVATT said that the priority accorded to primary health care was encouraging, particularly in view of the high maternal and infant mortality rates in Ghana. In view of the high fertility rate and the declining rate of contraceptive use, especially in rural areas, she wondered what steps were being taken at the school and community levels to promote sex education and family planning education. There was also a growing need for education on AIDS and safe sex practices.

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69. In view of the continued practice of female circumcision, despite the new laws and proposals mentioned by the representative of Ghana, she wondered what resources were being committed to its eradication and, in addition, what training was provided for traditional midwives and whether relevant public education programmes were being conducted. She understood that the introduction of new charges for health services had limited the population's access to health care, and she wondered what effect that had had on the health of women and children. Finally, she asked whether information could be given on the number of women doctors in the country.

70. Ms. AOUIJ said that, according to UNFPA figures, Ghana's population growth rate of 3.2 per cent and fertility rate of 6.3 per cent were among the highest in the world. The combination of those two factors had reduced birth spacing and had given Ghana the world's third highest maternal mortality rate. While the desire for larger families was prompted by the need for an increased agricultural workforce, the consequent growth in the numbers of children also placed an additional strain on the land and had led to a change in attitudes among farmers to family size. A laudable initiative had been the forming of so-called fathers' clubs, to raise awareness among men about the necessity for family planning methods and for the use of male forms of contraception. She wondered what measures were being taken under the Ghana National Family Planning Programme to promote such contraceptive use and to what extent men were participating in its activities.

Article 13

71. Ms. UKEJE asked, with reference to paragraph 213 of the report, what steps were being taken in real terms to combat, if not eliminate, the deplorable practice of female circumcision, which was a problem shared by other regions in Africa.

Article 15

72. Ms. AKAMATSU noted the references to a patrilineal system, in paragraph 268, and to a matrilineal system, in paragraph 273, and wondered what the ratio of patrilineal and matrilineal systems was in Ghanaian society.

73. Paragraph 268 stated that single women could choose their place of residence without restriction, suggesting that they possibly had more freedom than married women. She wondered, therefore, how many single women there were in Ghanaian society and whether they were freely able to obtain employment.

Article 16

74. Ms. UKEJE drew attention to paragraphs 271-320 and table 1, concerning marriage in Ghana. In view of the very high proportion of women married under customary law, in other words, in potentially polygamous marriages, it was

heartening that the Ghanaian Government had enacted the laws specified in paragraph 316, aimed at abolishing cruel funeral rites and at correcting anomalies in customary law relating to intestate succession. She hoped that the enactment of that legislation would give hope to the many African women who suffered under similar degrading practices.

75. Ms. FORDE observed that the legal situation regarding marriage in Ghana was very complex, with several parallel legal forms, and she wondered whether it was possible in practice to move from one form to another and whether women could opt for a particular form of marriage. With reference to the disclosures in paragraph 286 concerning the husband's right to beat his wife, she noted that in her country, under English law, the law on assault and battery could be invoked to prohibit such practices. Finally, she wondered whether changes might be necessary in the area of maintenance and property rights under customary law.

76. Ms. AKAMATSU said that the high proportion of marriages under customary law was a cause of serious concern. The revelations in paragraph 276, concerning the payment of the bride-price and the perception that marriage was not so much the union of a man and a woman as the union of their two families, in paragraph 286, concerning polygamy and the superiority of the husband, and in paragraph 290, concerning the discriminatory situation regarding divorce, could not be reconciled with the provisions of article 16 of the Convention. It was heartening, therefore, that a new draft constitution was under consideration.

77. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee's discussion of Ghana's report had been characterized by the high level of interest shown by all members. The report was very candid, containing much valuable detail and a careful assessment of the plight of Ghanaian women. The Government and the authorities in Ghana had the political will to improve the status of women, as evidenced by the measures that had been undertaken, the enactment of new legislation and the social programmes introduced to combat polygamy, illiteracy and widowhood rites. While progress had been made, however, problems remained, particularly in the area of customary practices.

78. She hoped that Ghana's report would encourage members of the Committee in their work and would lead to the adoption of further recommendations on ways to promote effective implementation of the Convention.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.